

AFRICAN NEGRO ART

From the collection of

FRANK CROWNINSHIELD

March 20 through April 25, 1937

B R O O K L Y N M U S E U M

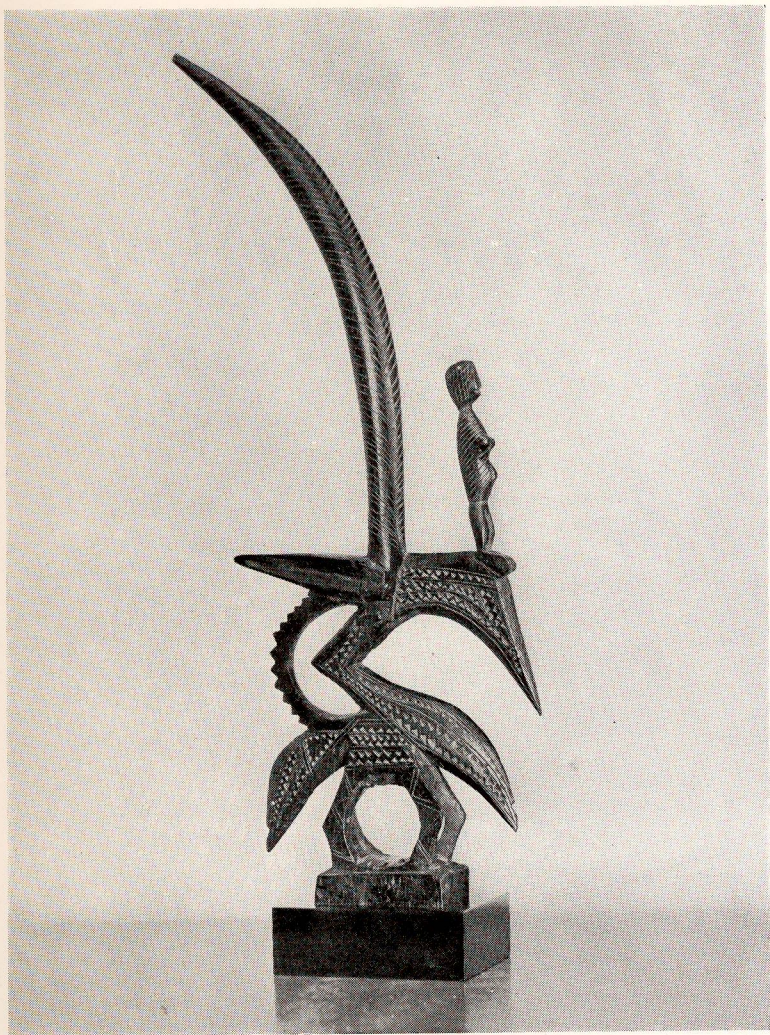
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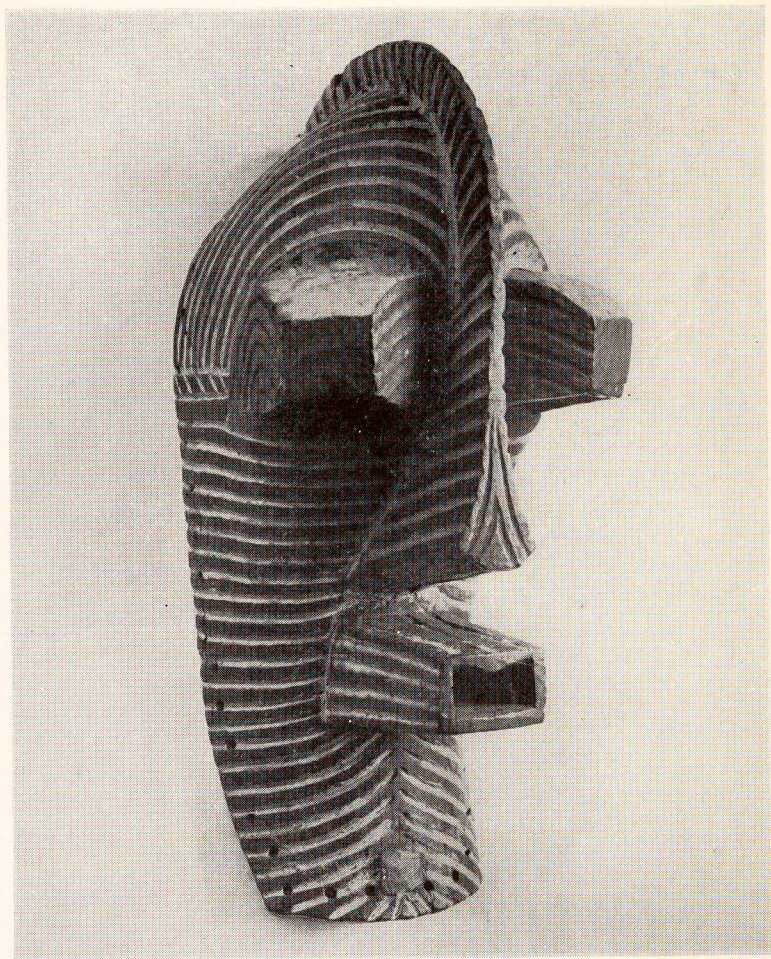
MUSEUM OF OKLAHOMA



Antelope Head Ornament

Antelopes such as these are worn attached to basketwork caps in the sowing and harvesting festivals. From French Sudan, Bambara

From the Collection of Frank Crowninshield



The Sorcerer's Mask

Mask of polychrome wood used by sorcerer
From Bena Mpassa, Belgian Congo
From the Collection of Frank Crowninshield

THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM wishes to
express its appreciation to Mr. Frank
Crowninshield for the opportunity to
exhibit his private collection of . . .
AFRICAN NEGRO ART, and to ac-
knowledge indebtedness to Dr. Herbert
J. Spinden, to Mr. Robert Goldwater,
and to Mr. John Graham for their aid in
compiling this catalogue and classifying
the objects in the collection.

FOREWORD

Appreciation of the sculptural art of the African negro is a new thing of the Twentieth Century. It is hard to imagine the staid and self-conscious Victorians finding anything to praise in the heathen idols or ceremonial properties of darkest Africa. Missionaries of that time were busy upsetting native error while statesmen and generals were laying the foundations of economic control in the interests of empire. But shortly before the World War a few adventurous students of art began noting admirable qualities in the naive, sturdy and forthright sculptures which negroes had been carving from tree trunks. Today there is wide approval of African art both for its intrinsic and extrinsic merits.

I say intrinsic and extrinsic merits because it seems we must distinguish divided interests. In the first place African and other so-called primitive expressions in plastic design have certain qualities which are absolutely esthetic, producing rhythms of beauty which drum inevitably upon sensitive nerve ends. In the second place they have a meaning and significance which may be quite different for the original maker and the ultimate collector, black and white. For negroes in Africa, these shapes of art still have magical purposes expressing a religion which connects human welfare with the vague hierarchy of natural powers, with ghosts of the dead, spirits of bush and stream, everything which the negro communities have come to consider fearful and mysterious. For the white man, no matter how sophisticated he may be in his present way of living, the same strange and beautiful figures provide experiences in a new and different order.

It is part of our present culture that we open our minds to the past, that we let down the barriers of intolerance and do our best to understand the emotions and ideals of all the tribes and nations of mankind. Also it is part of our present culture to recognize true skill, true artistry, even from the hands of backward peoples—perhaps I should say especially from the hands of backward peoples. Archeology gives us fossil emotions from the past and when we consider archeological records in the light of still living magical art among savage tribes we are enabled to travel again the upward road of man's spiritual evolution. Only in this way can we see useful and esthetic arts unfolding in true historic sequence.

It seems, in general, that the emergence of representative arts, and even much that we would now call decorative, finds its origin in concepts of religious magic. Animals are pictured to give man power over them, or to enlist their voluntary compliance with human needs. More important still are conventional figures of human beings devised to keep the spirits of the dead from doing harm to the living, or better still to turn ancestors into household gods. Such art still lives in Africa. In the handiwork of primitive artists inspired by such ideas we see shapes which profoundly affect us in an esthetic way. They have dignity, sincerity and simplicity. Strictly speaking they are not merely men and animals of the natural world, instead they are spiritual visitors from the supernatural world. They are products of creative imagination and it is possible for us to enjoy them as such without too much deference to ethnological fact.

Nevertheless there is that other element to consider—namely that we belong in an age which wishes to understand as well as to feel. Some future student of present ways may aptly write: "It was then that men tried to discover and understand all things. It was then that men stepped out of their proper selves and their proper times to view without prejudice a pageant of art throughout the ages and coming from the ends of the earth. It was then that men humbled themselves to become the true heirs of excellence, whenever and wherever found."

Africa is a home of diversified tribal arts. Here are styles and patterns which change from tribe to tribe, even from village to village, but which nevertheless are grounded upon jealously preserved traditions. The total picture is one of great variety in the conventional representations of men, women, birds and animals. But in separate localities there is repetition, sometimes stupid, sometimes inspired. Fundamental sculptural forms which are the result of a slow selection often receive final touches from some especially sensitive artist and become superb; others remain safely typical—merely interesting social products serving needs which may exist only in a group mind. Also, of course, there is a mass of pure decoration generally without any ulterior religious motive, which likewise varies from tribe to tribe and is applied to household utensils, baskets, mats and other objects.

The zone of the most typical and interesting African art extends across the continent between 15 degrees north latitude and 15 degrees south latitude. But within this equatorial area the artistic products are

more richly developed in the west than in the east. Among the tribes which produce sculptures of great subtlety I mention the Bambara of the upper Niger, the Dan who live south of them on the Ivory Coast, and a line of other tribes extending farther west along the Gold and Slave Coasts. Benin, west of the lower Niger, is a famous center and then we turn south on the Bight of Guinea to take in the Ibo, Bakoko, Fan and Bakota. Then in the Belgian Congo there are many tribes doing good work but generally of diminishing esthetic interest.

Masks are worn in Africa for several purposes, the general idea being that the wearer changes his individuality and becomes for the time being the person whom the mask represents. Shamans or witch doctors often have several masks which they put on to impersonate their spiritual helpers so as to accomplish magical rites. Members of secret societies may wear masks in important ceremonies of their order and there are dances in which masked men impersonate returning spirits of the dead. Often masks are made to represent the heads of animals.

Fetishes are figures in which a spirit takes up its residence. Of course such a spirit is called upon to assist the owner of the fetish. Household gods of a more dignified type commonly represent ancestors.

Mortuary monuments of the Bakota, used like grave posts, are constructed of wood surfaced with brass, copper and iron. They represent the dead but with most of the detail lavished on the face, the flaring hair and the semi-lunar headdress, the body being reduced to a mere diamond shaped figure. The faces are curiously concave, those of the women entirely so while men may have a concave face below the eyebrows and a bulging forehead above.

The specimens in Mr. Crowninshield's collection are selected for their esthetic qualities but generally this means that they are fine examples of old work filled with ancient illusions.

HERBERT J. SPINDEN

CATALOGUE

I. TANGANYIKA:

1. Seat supported by two caryatide figures
2. Standing male figure

II. ANGOLA:

3. Head of a sceptre or carrying stick. *Vatchivokoe tribe*
4. Sceptre. *Vatchivokoe tribe*

III. BELGIAN CONGO:

A. LOWER CONGO:

5. Fetish with magical substances. *Bakongo tribe*
6. Fetish with magical substances. *Bakongo tribe*
7. Fetish with magical substances. *Bakongo tribe*
8. Fetish with magical substances. *Bakongo tribe*
9. Fetish with magical substances. *Bakongo tribe*
10. Fetish with magical substances. *Bakongo tribe*
11. Kneeling female figure. *Bakongo tribe*
12. Standing figure with helmet. *Bakongo tribe*
13. Standing female figure. *Bakongo tribe*

B. KATONGA REGION:

14. Striped polychrome mask. *Bena Mpassa tribe*
15. Caryatide seat. *Warua tribe*
16. Standing figure. *Warua tribe*
17. Head rest
18. Standing male figure
19. Standing figure
20. Fetish. Ivory. *Warega tribe*
21. Fetish. Ivory. *Warega tribe*
22. Fetish. Ivory. *Warega tribe*
23. Fetish. Ivory. *Warega tribe*
24. Fetish. Ivory. *Warega tribe*
25. Fetish. Ivory. *Warega tribe*

26. Fetish. Ivory. *Manyema tribe*
27. Fetish. Ivory. *Manyema tribe*
28. Fetish. Ivory. *Manyema tribe*
29. Fetish. Ivory. *Manyema tribe*
30. Fetish. Ivory. *Manyema tribe*
31. Fetish. Ivory. *Manyema tribe*
32. Fetish. Ivory. *Manyema tribe*
33. Fetish. Ivory. *Manyema tribe*
34. Fetish. Ivory. *Manyema tribe*
35. Fetish. Ivory. *Manyema tribe*
36. Bracelet. Ivory. *Manyema tribe*
37. Bracelet. Ivory. *Manyema tribe*
38. Bracelet. Ivory. *Manyema tribe*
39. Bracelet. Ivory. *Manyema tribe*

C. KASAI REGION:

40. Caryatide seat supported by a kneeling woman. *Bakuba.*
41. Cup in the shape of a head. *Bakuba*
42. Cup in the shape of a head. *Bakuba*
43. Cup in the shape of a standing figure. *Bakuba*
44. Cup in the shape of a head. *Bambala tribe*
45. Cup in the shape of a head.
46. Ceremonial hoe. *Bateke*
47. Ceremonial hoe. *Bapende*
48. Standing figure. *Bapende*
49. Sorcerer's bottle in the form of a kneeling woman. *Bapende*
50. Standing male figure with helmet. *Bapende*
51. Dancing girl. *Bapende*
52. Head rest in the shape of an animal. *Bayaka*
53. Head rest supported by a head and two arms. *Bayaka*
54. Small figurine. *Bayaka*
55. Small drum. *Bayaka*
56. Ancient elephant mask. *Bayaka*
57. Commemorative statuette. *Bena Lulua*
58. Commemorative statuette. *Bena Lulua*
59. Standing figure. *Bena Lulua*

60. Seated figure. *Bena Lulua*

61. Musical instrument

D. NORTHERN CONGO:

62. Standing figure. Ivory. *Mangbettu*

63. Knife. *Mangbettu*

64. Box with human head. *Mangbettu*

IV. FRENCH EQUATORIAL AFRICA:

A. FRENCH CONGO:

65. Ceremonial mask. *Loango tribe*

66. Fan. *Loango tribe*

B. GABUN:

67. Mask. *Ogoue River*

68. Mortuary double mask. Metal. *Bakota*

69. Mortuary mask. Metal. *Bakota*

70. Mortuary mask. Metal. *Bakota*

71. Mortuary mask. Metal. *Bakota*

72. Mortuary mask. Metal. *Bakota*

73. Mortuary mask. Metal. *Bakota*

74. Mortuary mask. Metal. *Bakota*

75. Mortuary mask. Metal. *Bakota*

76. Mortuary mask. Metal. *Bakota*

77. Mortuary mask. Metal. *Bakota*

78. Mortuary mask. Metal. *Bakota*

79. Mortuary mask. Metal. *Bakota*

80. Mortuary mask. Metal. *Bakota*

81. Mortuary mask. Metal. *Bakota*

82. Fetish. *Pahouin*

83. Dancing figure. *Pahouin*

84. Man holding a cup. *Pahouin*

85. Man holding a cup. *Pahouin*

86. Large female figure. *Pahouin*

87. Seated figure. *Pahouin*

88. Male figure. *Pahouin*

89. Female figure. *Pahouin*

90. Female figure. *Pahouin*

V. CAMEROON:

- 91. Head with headdress of three lizards (?)
- 92. Head of grey wood
- 93. Head covered with human (?) skin. *Cross River*
- 94. Lion head
- 95. Standing figure

VI. NIGERIA:

A. BENIN:

- 96. Woman holding a fan. *Bronze*
- 97. Man holding a weapon. *Bronze*

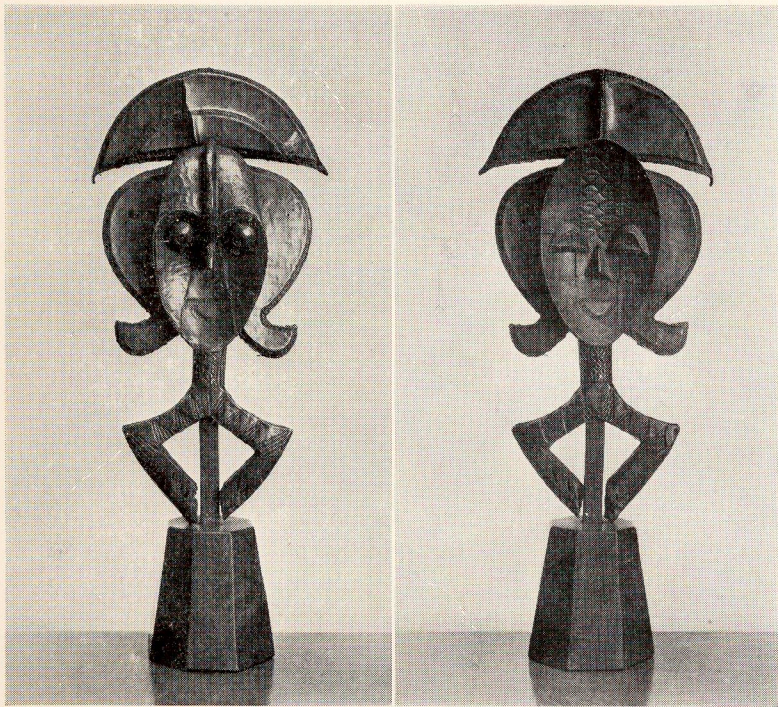
B. YORUBA:

- 98. Helmet mask with animal (probably anteater) on top
- 99. Standing figure

VII. FRENCH WEST AFRICA:

A. IVORY COAST:

- 100. A king seated on a leopard. *Baule*
- 101. Demi-god Glow holding his beard. *Baule*
- 102. Standing male figure. *Baule*
- 103. Female figure. *Baule*
- 104. Female figure. *Baule*
- 105. Small female figure. *Baule*
- 106. Small female figure. *Baule*
- 107. Spinning bobbin. *Baule*
- 108. Gold weight. *Baule*
- 109. Ladle supported by legs. *Baule*
- 110. Ladle with bird for handle. *Baule*
- 111. Mask with crested headdress. *Baule*
- 112. Mask with geometric headdress. *Baule*
- 113. Small mask with horns. *Baule*
- 114. Mask with bird's beak for headdress. *Baule*
- 115. Mask with horns. *Baule*
- 116. "Goli" mask. *Baule*
- 117. Antelope mask. *Baule*
- 118. Mask with horns. *Baule*



Double Mortuary Mask

Brass, copper, iron and wood. From Bakota, Gabon
Left: obverse, male view. Right: reverse, female view
From the Collection of Frank Crowninshield



African Figures

Left: from Ivory Coast, Baule. Right: from Nigeria, Benin
From the Collection of Frank Crowninshield

- 119. Mask. *Dan tribe*
- 120. Mask. *Dan tribe*
- 121. Mask. *Dan tribe*
- 122. Mask. *Dan tribe*
- 123. Mask. *Dan tribe*
- 124. Mask. *Dan tribe*
- 125. Mask. *Dan tribe*
- 126. Mask. *Dan tribe*
- 127. Mask. *Dan tribe*
- 128. Mask. *Dan tribe*
- 129. Mask. *Dan tribe*
- 130. Mask. *Dan tribe*
- 131. Mask. *Dan tribe*
- 132. Mask. *Dan tribe*
- 133. Gorilla Mask. *Dan tribe*
- 134. Gorilla Mask. *Dan tribe*
- 135. Bird mask. *Toma*
- 136. Bird mask. *Toma*
- 137. Polychrome mask. *Senufo*

B. FRENCH GUINEA:

- 138. Ivory horn
- 139. Ivory horn
- 140. Standing figure

C. FRENCH SUDAN:

- 141. Antelope with young on back. *Bambara*
- 142. Antelope. *Bambara*
- 143. Antelope with female figure. *Bambara*
- 144. Door lock in shape of female figure. *Bambara*
- 145. Female ancestral figure. *Bambara*
- 146. Female ancestral figure. *Bambara*
- 147. Female figure. *Bambara*
- 148. Standing figure. *Habbe*
- 149. Mask. *Senufo*
- 150. Mask. *Bambara*

VIII. SIERRA LEONE:

- 151. Standing figure.

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